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Dr M briefed on airport's problems

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SEPANG, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who arrived at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport from Langkawi this evening, was briefed on the airport's problems by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Malaysia Airlines executive chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli and Malaysia Airports Berhad officials.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said the problems surfaced due to breakdown of communication lines, insufficient signages and mechanical failure in baggage handling.

He said there was a communication breakdown between some departments which resulted in flight delays.

Dr Mahathir said as the airport was very big, some passengers did not know their way.

He said it had been pointed out earlier that the directions were not that clear and the airport management had identified areas where more signages needed to be put up.

"The other matter was the mechanical failure at the luggage section and they (airport staff) could not sort the luggage ... therefore some passengers did not get their luggage. This is being sorted out by the relevant authorities," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if he was confident the problems would be resolved, he said:

"I am confident. I won't say within the next few hours ... But there were other new airports which could not function at all when they were opened."

Dr Mahathir said despite the hitches, the planes were able to land and take off.

"There is no problem with the control tower and I think that is a very good thing."

Asked if there was a back-up system for communications, he said there should be one but airport staff used their handphones to communicate.

On whether it could be said that there were no serious complications on the airport's first day of commercial operations, Dr Mahathir said: "Not very serious complications. I wish there were no complications but I had all along suspected that there would be."

He said when he received a call from Tajudin, he suspected something amiss.

"And sure enough, he told me there is a lot of confusion there. I was in Langkawi and decided to come back earlier."

Dr Ling told reporters that angry passengers came to him to complain about the problems they encountered such as having to wait for three to four hours to collect their baggage.

"There were passengers who were very angry because they came with high expectations."

Dr Ling said the various agencies were making every effort to overcome the problems.

"On behalf of the ministry, I would like to apologise to the passengers for the inconveniences caused," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, yesterday joined 70 passengers on a Malaysia Airlines flight to Langkawi, the first commercial flight out of the KLIA.

They had arrived at the new airport last night to witness the transfer of equipment from the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang to KLIA.

They also visited the duty-free outlets and MAS Golden Lounge at the satellite building.

The couple spent the night at the KLIA Airside Transit Hotel before leaving for Langkawi at 7.25am, 25 minutes later than scheduled.

While on the island, Dr Mahathir was briefed on a proposed college project before proceeding to Tanjung Malai for a briefing on the second phase of a RM100 million venture by Awana Hotel and Resort vice-executive president Wong Choon Kee.